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A 12TH CENTURY CEMETERY FRAGMENT FROM GILĂU (CLUJ COUNTY) (GERM.: JULMARKT; HUNG.: GYALU)*

Adriana Isac¹, Erwin Gáll², Szilárd Gál³

Abstract: Six graves from the Gilău cemetery – part of larger churchyard – were the subject of a small-sized excavation. They were located next to the highway, on the left side of the access road to the medieval castle. The grave goods (lockrings, opened finger-rings, coins of the Huszár nr. 73 or CNH nr. 103 type) were dated to the 12th century and thus confirm the presence of a human settlement long before 1241, probably also in the 12th century. The cemetery adds important data to our knowledge on the medieval settlements from the Cluj county.

Keywords: Transylvania, Gilău, cemetery, 12th century, habitat

Gilău is spreading on a large area at the basis of Gilău Mountains at the confluence of Someșul Mic River with Căpușu River, surrounded from three parts by high hills. In the middle of the commune which is situated at 18 km from Cluj-Napoca, on the southern hillside of the national road leading to Oradea, is located the imposing castle belonging to Gheorghe Rákóczy I (prince of Transylvania between 1630–1648) respectively to the Bánffy family. The part of the medieval cemetery was found in this area, in the castle park (Fig. 1–2).

Complex arrangement and restoration works were made in the roman camp to be found in this location, under the guidance of Dan Isac, in charge of Gilău site, at the initiative and with the support of Nicolae Gudea, the President of the 16th Roman Frontiers Congress organizing committee (held in Zalău in September 1997). On this occasion we received information regarding the discovery during winter 1996 of three skeletons and a bronze earring (very likely a lock ring) which could not be recovered. The discovery was possible after digging a wastewater discharge basin near the former “Disco Club” placed at the bottom of the promontory on which Rákóczy–Bánffy Castle is located and where the roman camp was also found⁴.

As early as the 60's during the last century, human skeletons were reported almost in the same area, but more precisely at the main entrance, in the Bánffy Castlepark. With the occasion of “Cluj–Oradea” roadside development, such findings were discovered right under the European road as well as inside the courtyards belonging to the residents living in the vicinity

* The authors wish to thank on this occasion again to Professor Dan Isac, in charge with the Gilău archaeological site, for offering the material and information related to this discovery, for publication purposes.

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⁴ ISAC 1997.

of the road. The information assemblage strengthened the feeling of those who made systematic excavations in the roman camp (a team directed by Dan Isac between 1976 and 1985) concerning the possible existence in this place of a roman cemetery belonging to the fortification. As a result, the National Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj decided to make a sondage in the place where the human bones were uncovered, in the winter of 1996. Adriana Isac, museum curator at the above mentioned institution was put in charge with the works surveillance.



Fig. 1. Gilău. Location of the necropolis.

The survey ditch consisted of a 6×1.50 m trench oriented ENE–WSW approximately 1 meter away from the basin dugged in December 1996 and about 3 m from the wall of the building in which the disotheque functioned (18th century building). Up to the depth of 1.40–1.50 meters the trench revealed a mixed soil resulting after modern interventions, in which prehistoric (Tiszapolgár type), roman and medieval ceramic fragments together with yellow carrier stones, nail fragments and atypical iron objects could be found. A fragment of a Roman stone *mortarium* appeared, obviously in secondary position.

Starting with the depth of 1.60–1.70 meters a large number of human bones fragments came out, predicting the existence of certain human skeletons which have been documented at about 1.90 m. After passing through the summary documentation it can be noted that near the skeletons some nails were discovered.



Fig. 2. Gilău. The survey ditch and the suppositional extension of the necropolis.

I. Graves description

Grave 1: inhumation, supine skeleton. *Age:* maturus–senilis (over 50 years old). *Skeleton's condition:* the teeth are extremely deteriorated (the 3rd molar is used to dentine), 1st and 2nd molars fell pre-mortem and the alveolus decreased. The deceased indicates a maturus-senilis individual (over 50 years old); muscle traces are not very well marked, the long bones are delicate, the right humerus head appears to have a diameter under 45 mm; remaining uncertain, the skeleton can be determined as a woman. The skull is mostly destroyed. The right arm is placed at 45° on the pelvis, and the left one was probably lying beside the body, judging from unavailable photograph. *Orientation:* VNV–ESE. *Depth:* approx. 1.90 m. The skeleton goes partially or totally into the eastern profile from the pelvis area (Pl. 1/2). Without grave goods.

Grave 2: inhumation, supine skeleton. It can be found at the end of the trench. *Age:* adult skeleton (35–45 years). *Skeleton's condition:* the teeth look pretty good, except the fact that the central incisor I1 (3) is missing from the mandible (most likely fell after death). The mandible's angle seem to indicate *masculine* marks. However a sex determination after one picture can not be realised and all observations must be explained with caution. The right arm is placed along the body, while for the left arm there is no information. *Orientation:* VNV-ESE. *Depth:* approx. 1.90 m. The skeleton goes partially or totally into the eastern profile from the pelvis area (Pl. 1/1, 3).

Grave goods:

1. *Simple bronze lock ring, with S shaped end*, with a small diameter, found on the right side of the skull 1. Diameter: 1.7 cm; 2. Height: 1.9 cm; 3. S end width: 0.2 cm; 4. Cell thickness: 0.1 cm. Weight: 0.46 grams. National Museum of Transylvanian History Cluj-Napoca (further MNIT); not inventoried (Fig. 4/3).

2. *Simple bronze lock ring, with S shaped end*, with an extremely large diameter. 1. Diameter: 5.1 cm; 2. height: 5.0 cm; 3. Width of the fragmentary S end: 0.45 cm; 4. Cell thickness: 0.2 m. Weight: 3.77grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 4/1).

3. *Silver lock ring of good quality S shaped end, decorated with excised notches*, with a small diameter. The S end is broken on one side. 1. Diameter: 1.9 cm; 2. Height: 2.1 cm; 3. S end width: 0.4 cm; 4. Cell thickness: 0.15 cm. Weight: 1.12 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 4/1)



Fig. 3. Grave 5. Bronze finger ring with a blue stone.

4. *Fragments of a bronzelock ring*. 1. Cell thickness: 0.12 cm. Weight: 0.30 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 4/4).

5. *Flattened bronze finger ring opened with thinned ends. The ring's chaton is widened in the middle, decorated by incisions of 2 rows of carved dots*. 1. Height: 2.2 cm; 2. Chaton width: 1.7 cm; 3. Cell width: 0.4 cm. Weight: 2.92 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 4/5).

Grave 3: inhumation, supine skeleton. It is placed at the end of the trench. *Age:* juvenis (17–21 years). *Skeleton's condition:* the epiphysis are not ossified which means that the epiphyseal synostosis had not ended; this anomaly can be seen on the femur's inferior part. The individual died at an early age. *Funerary ritual aspects:* the skull's placement over a bed of small river stones and gravel may be noted. *Depth:* approx. 1.90 m.

Orientation: WNW–ESE. From the defunct inferior limbs only the tibiae and feet go into the eastern profile (Pl. 1/1, 4). Without grave goods.

Grave 4: inhumation, supine skeleton. *Age:* mature-adult skeleton? Disturbed. The deceased inferior limbs go partially in the eastern profile. Without grave goods.

Grave 5: mature-adult skeleton? The deceased inferior limbs go partially or totally in the eastern profile. *Orientation:* WNW–ESE (Pl. 1/5).

Grave goods:

1. *Silver lock ring simple with S shaped end*, with a medium diameter, found on the left temporal bone. 1. Diameter: 2.4 cm; 2. Height: 2.4 cm; 3. S end width: 0.25 cm; 4. Cell thickness: 0.2 cm. Weight: 1.42 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 5/2).

2. *Bronze lock ring with S shaped end*, with a medium diameter, found on the left temporal bone. 1. Diameter: 2.1 cm; 2. Height: 2.6 cm; 3. S end width: 0.5 cm; 4. Cell thickness: 0.1 cm. Weight: 0.91 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 5/1).

3. *Bronze coin from the skeleton's pit*. 1. Diameter: 2.2 × 2.2 cm. Weight: 1.09 grams. MNIT; not inventoried (Fig. 5/4).

4. *The Chaton from a bronze finger ring* with a blue stone in the gem's place. 1. Chaton's diameter: 1.3 cm; 2. Gem's place diameter: 0.7 cm; 3. Cell width: 1.0 cm. Weight: 1.60 grams. M. N. I. T. Not inventoried (Fig.: 3; 5/3).

Grave 6: inhumation, supine skeleton. Placed at the end of the trench. *Age:* adult individual. *Skeleton condition:* neither ecto- and endocranial sutures nor the dental status can be analyzed on the basis of a single picture. Even so, after the femur's robust appearance it looks like a male individual. The deceased inferior limbs go partially in the eastern profile (Pl. 1/6). Without grave goods.

All six skeletons are of various ages: from juvenis to maturus-senilis (over 50 years). Approximate observations regarding the individual's biologic sexuality based on pictures could be made only for graves 2 (the deceased was, very likely, a man – after the femur's robust aspect). In other cases we have not enough information for sex determination.

II. Considerations regarding the nature of the cemetery fragment and funerary rituals⁵

Taking into account the small extent of the excavation, we can only express relative opinions regarding the cemetery's character. Observations concerning the high number of human bone remains which started to come out from the depth of 1.60–1.70 meters show that this is a case of several funeral layers, characteristic to cemeteries known in the archaeological literature as *churchyard cemeteries*⁶.

As it can be easily noted, the arms' position was alongside the body, generally characteristic to all skeletons from the arpadian cemeteries belonging to the 11th–13th centuries⁷. If it

⁵ The information according to which “several nails observed near the skeletons might come from coffins” cannot be, in any way, interpreted. Coffins usage in 12th century see GÁLL ET AL. 2011, 44.

⁶ Surprising as it may seem, until the early 70's of the past century the matter of the churchyard cemeteries was particularly researched by Hungarian archaeologists. All western European synthesis papers were based on their results (for example: G. P. Fehring, I. Fingerlin). The research of the necropolises around the church started together with Béla Pósta excavation near Budapest since 1882 (the manuscript is available for interested readers at Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum archive). Also Béla Pósta researched Alba Iulia Cathedral's cemetery. Kálmán Szabó, Alajos Bálint and Márta Szél had essential contributions concerning this type of necropolises from Szeged area. The development of the archaeological excavations surrounding the churches is rather related to István Méri and his excavation from Chidea (hung.: Kide) (Cluj county) (MÉRI 1944). The note was written based on the recommendations and data provided by our colleague from Hungarian National Museum, Ágnes Ritoók, to whom we express thanks on this occasion also. The list of necropolises around the churches from the Transylvanian Basin, 11th–13th centuries (GÁLL 2011, Pl. 64).

⁷ On the arms' position in arpadian necropolises from Northern Transylvania: GÁLL/GERGELY/GÁL 2010, 46–50, Fig. 15–17; GÁLL 2011, 21–27.

was correctly and well-observed, the stone boulders' presence at Gilău in grave no. 3 reveals a ritual encountered also in other 12th century cemeteries from North Transylvanian Basin. The most relevant examples are in Cluj–“Piața Centrală” (Central square) and in Dăbâca (hung.: Doboka) enclosure IV respectively “Tamas’s Garden” and “Boldăgă”⁸. The situation found at Gilău resembles strikingly the ritual from graves no. 1–14 at Cluj–“Piața Centrală”. Given the small distance and the lack of natural barriers between these two locations, this ritual may be interpreted as characteristic for 12th century burials in Cluj area and it can also indicate human relationships for communities living in Cluj county surrounding micro-regions.

III. About the archaeological material

The grave goods are represented only by those few “lock rings” coming from two graves and by two finger rings. The rings’ function remains often in question, especially because of their position in the grave: they could have been used as *lock rings* but in certain cases as earrings⁹ also.

Four lock rings were discovered at Gilău in grave no. 2. Considering their position there is no doubt that they were fixed on a textile ribbon and worn as hair accessories. An aspect that should be noticed is the dimension variety of pieces which appear together (the biggest 5.0 × 5.1, the smallest 1.7 × 1.9 cm).

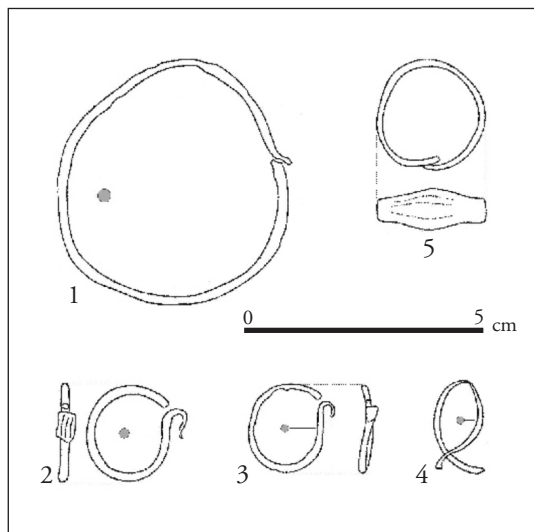


Fig. 4. Grave 2: grave goods.

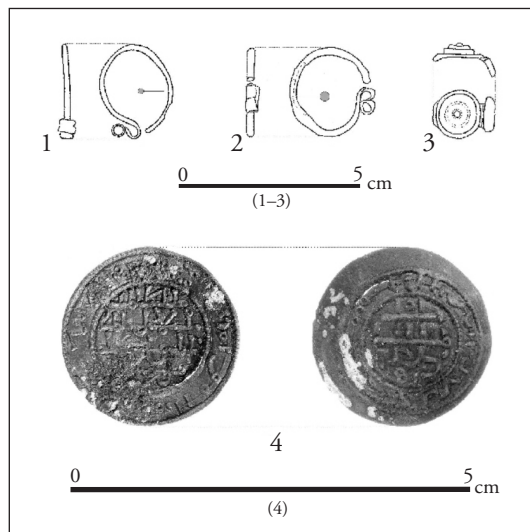


Fig. 5. Grave 5: grave goods.

Likewise, we can easily assume the same function for the other two pieces belonging to grave no. 5, found on the left temporal bone. As a conclusion we express the opinion that the term lock ring, in these cases (but not only) was improperly used. Which term can be more suitable for this kind of objects? Considering their position, these items found in grave no. 2 at Gilău were used as *hair ribbon decoration*.

Such jewellery which in the archaeological literature is known as S shaped end jewellery were “representatives” of a new hair style but this didn’t prevent people who came into their possession to use them in other ways (for example as earrings) or in other positions.

We must point out the fact that the usage of jewellery is not only a practical/mechanical gesture, but a social-psychological one. This type of rings has also a social dimension which is expressed in significant differences within each society or micro-community.

⁸ GÁLL/GERGELY/GÁL 2010, 45–46, Pl. 57; GÁLL 2011, 20–21, Pl. 48.

⁹ Regarding this matter, more examples are discussed in another paper. See: GÁLL 2008, vol. I. 143–144.

The S shape end ring with a large diameter found in grave no. 2 must be separately approached. Such pieces coming from archaeological contexts which can be undoubtedly dated in 11th century are not known. The item draws our attention also because considering the whole Transylvanian Basin such jewellery is very rare. We mention here similar findings at Dăbâca-area IV grave 114, 176, 212 and 267, Ulieș (hung.: Kányád) grave 43, respectively in Peteni (hung.: Petőfalva) and Zăbala (hung.: Zabola) necropolises¹⁰. Their position inside the above mentioned graves is better documented than the one at Gilău and indicates that this type of rings does not have a special functionality.

The various types of lock rings which can be dated in 10th–13th centuries found in the Transylvanian basin were very popular among Early Medieval Age in fashion accessories. Therefore they are attested in a high percentage in 10th–13th century cemeteries from the Carpathian Basin and Central and Eastern Europe¹¹. Obviously it is about a certain civilization level of the East-European area, in this case about a certain hairstyle¹².

The bronze finger ring with carved dots forming three rows on the widened end is opened. The same stamping technique but reproducing other decorations appears on several finger rings found at Cluj-Mănăstur cemetery, graves no. 41 and 75. The high number of finger rings makes us wonder about the possibility that these objects might have been manufactured here.

The bronze finger ring's chaton which came from grave no. 5 complicates the situation, because we have no indications as to its position in the grave. We have no knowledge of similar pieces belonging to 11th–13th centuries. Its shape strikingly resembles the shape of roman finger rings. Under the circumstances, the situation of a roman item used in medieval period should be seriously taken into consideration¹³. We might point out also that finger rings with chaton, characteristic to 12th–13th centuries, have totally different shapes than the item in discussion¹⁴.

The coin identified as *H73*¹⁵ places the cemetery in the 12th century. However, the item we are referring to comes from grave no. 5 pit, so it is also possible that the coin may belong to another grave destroyed by grave no. 5. This type of coin is extremely rare within other funerary discoveries from the Transylvanian Basin. One isolated item can be mentioned in Northern Transylvanian Basin, not far from Gilău, at the Institute of Agronomy, Cluj¹⁶.

IV. Archaeological considerations regarding Gilău cemetery

Only superficial observations can be made about Gilău community, given the fact that we didn't have the possibility to analyze the skeletons. Considering the above mentioned coin and the large dimension lock ring which is characteristic to 12th–13th centuries, we can date the Gilău cemetery fragment in the 12th century or at the beginning of the 13th century.

A discussion about the nature of Gilău locality as it was in 12th century must be made. The narrative sources indicate that this area was the property of the Transylvanian Episcopate

¹⁰ GÁLL 2011, 40; DERZSI/SÓFALVI 1990, Pl. 11/5; SZÉKELY 1993, 277–305.

¹¹ In Greater Poland and Lesser Poland, simple lock rings appear in a reduced number. Numerous are the temple rings with S shape end. A similar situation can be noticed in Moravia and actual Slovakia northern areas. Temple rings appear in a small percentage in Lower Danube necropolises (FIEDLER 1992, 171–172, Fig.: 14/10; 79/10; 87/13–15; 95/12; JAŹDŹEWSKI 1949, 91–191; MARCINIĄK 1960, 141–186; KASZEWSKY A./KASZEWSKY Z. 1971, 365–434; RASHEV 2008, Pl. LXXVIII/1–86, 88–89.

¹² BÁLINT 2006, 322.

¹³ Seeking to clarify the matter we have discussed with colleagues who have extensive knowledge in 2nd–4th centuries roman material culture (Péter Prohászka) as well as with those who are specialized in Byzantine archaeology (Ádám Bollók, Péter Langó). Their main idea, independently of each other, was that the finger ring is most likely a roman piece which could have been reused, or involved in the medieval cultural layer.

¹⁴ For example: PARÁDI 1975, 119–161.

¹⁵ We thank on this occasion to colleague László Kovács for offering his help in identifying the coin.

¹⁶ Unpublished. MNIT, the numismatic Cabinet, inventory no. : 12896.

established very likely in 1009. In this way, it would have been very interesting to have the anthropological analyses regarding the skeletons' conditions, pathological signs which can be observed on them, on which we could have constructed a closer image to highlight the way they lived and life conditions of those people. Which were the women's and which were the men's activities?

Furthermore, on a bigger sample of skeletons we might have observed the eventual variations regarding the character of their activities, which can easily indicate social differences. The cemetery's topography does not offer clues about the status of the community members, because there is no other archaeological data dating from 12th–13th centuries nearby. Besides, the existence of no exterior grave marks does not help in any way. Considering the special status of Gilău locality expressed by the narrative sources (Episcopal property) the social stratification must have been much more complex than in other 12th–13th Transylvanian areas or rural settlements.

The first document mentions about Gilău were made in 1246, at 5 years from the great Mongol invasion¹⁷. The documents reveal that the bishop of Transylvania, *Gallus*, had several possessions¹⁸, one of which was Gilău. Those who lived in Gilău did not belong to the prince's jurisdiction, as the locality was the episcopate's property until 14th century.

In 1304 the first mentions about the first church and its priest appear. Bishop *Andreas Szécsi* issued in 1345 a diploma on the basis of which we can assume the existence of at least one house worthy of his rank. The *Castrum* is mentioned only in 1428. In this way the issue of identifying imposing buildings must be taken into consideration in future, and Gilău can be interpreted as an Episcopal centre.

It can be concluded that the archaeological research in this case offered valuable information even by this small excavation: the cemetery fragment confirms the existence of a locality long before the tragic year 1241, meaning at least from the 12th century. Future research in this area must be encouraged, in order to gather more data regarding the cemetery and to identify traces of settlements (Fig. 2).

After mapping all known funerary discoveries such as those at Vulcani (hung.: Magyarvalkó), Gilău, Jucu (hung.: Nemeszúk), Sic (hung.: Szék) but also 14th century churches around Cluj areas, which, in most cases have previous buildings (later architectural elements can be followed) such as Luna de Sus (hung.: Magyarlónya) and Nima (hung.: Néma) (Pl. 2), it is pretty obvious that the cemetery's spreading area is much wider.

Although Cluj region is poorly researched, the dense system of settlements surrounding the county's centre starts since the 12th century. Their beginnings can be even earlier, certainly related to the 11th century, as cemeteries from Mănăştur and Jucu indicate,¹⁹ respectively coin discoveries

¹⁷ The 1241 Tatar invasion did not spare Cluj surrounding areas. In 1235 after conquering the northern Chinese Empire, the Tatar-Mongol army turned to western areas, and after defeating the Volga Bulgarians, the Baschiria Hungarian and Russian princes turned against the cumin king Kuthen. Without doubt, the main attack was turned against Hungary, the most important regional power in central Europe at that time. Even though Béla the IVth (1235–1270) permitted for the cumin population and army to take shelter in Hungary, after the fall of Kiev in 1240, the Tatar attack could not be avoided. Batu Khan attacked Hungary with three columns. In the first phase, two of them attacked Transylvania: the first contingent attacked from the north through Rodna destroying Bistrița, and after that occupied Cluj. According to the Echternach chronicle “countless Hungarians” were killed by Tatars until they passed through Meseș gates towards the Hungarian Great Plain. The massacre could have happened at Mănăştur fortification, where all residents from that area were sheltered. After Rogerius, the two Tatar armies devastated all Transylvania, remarkable being the fact that from Mureș valley until Frata village area (Cluj county) the monk did not see any living human. Instead he only saw numerous decaying corpses. The population of Transylvania was reduced to such a degree that several years later, in 1257 the bishop of Alba Iulia complained that there are only a few people left on his estates and they wander without reason LUPESCU 2005, 43 with the complete bibliography of this matter.

¹⁸ About the properties of the bishop of Transylvania: JAKÓ 2001, 98–115.

¹⁹ GÁLL/GERGELY/GÁL 2010, 115–124, 140–171.

in the cultural layer from the park near the Central Store (undetermined coin from Solomon) (unpublished). The H73 coin from the Institute of Agronomy in Cluj raises the possibility of the existence of a settlement or another cemetery near the citadel (at about. 400 meters away)²⁰.

Concluding, all data regarding the existence of a necropolis certified only that the cemetery was not roman but medieval, dating from 12th century. Even if it is small, the discovery brings many aspects into our attention especially concerning Cluj county medieval habitat.

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²⁰ See note 7.

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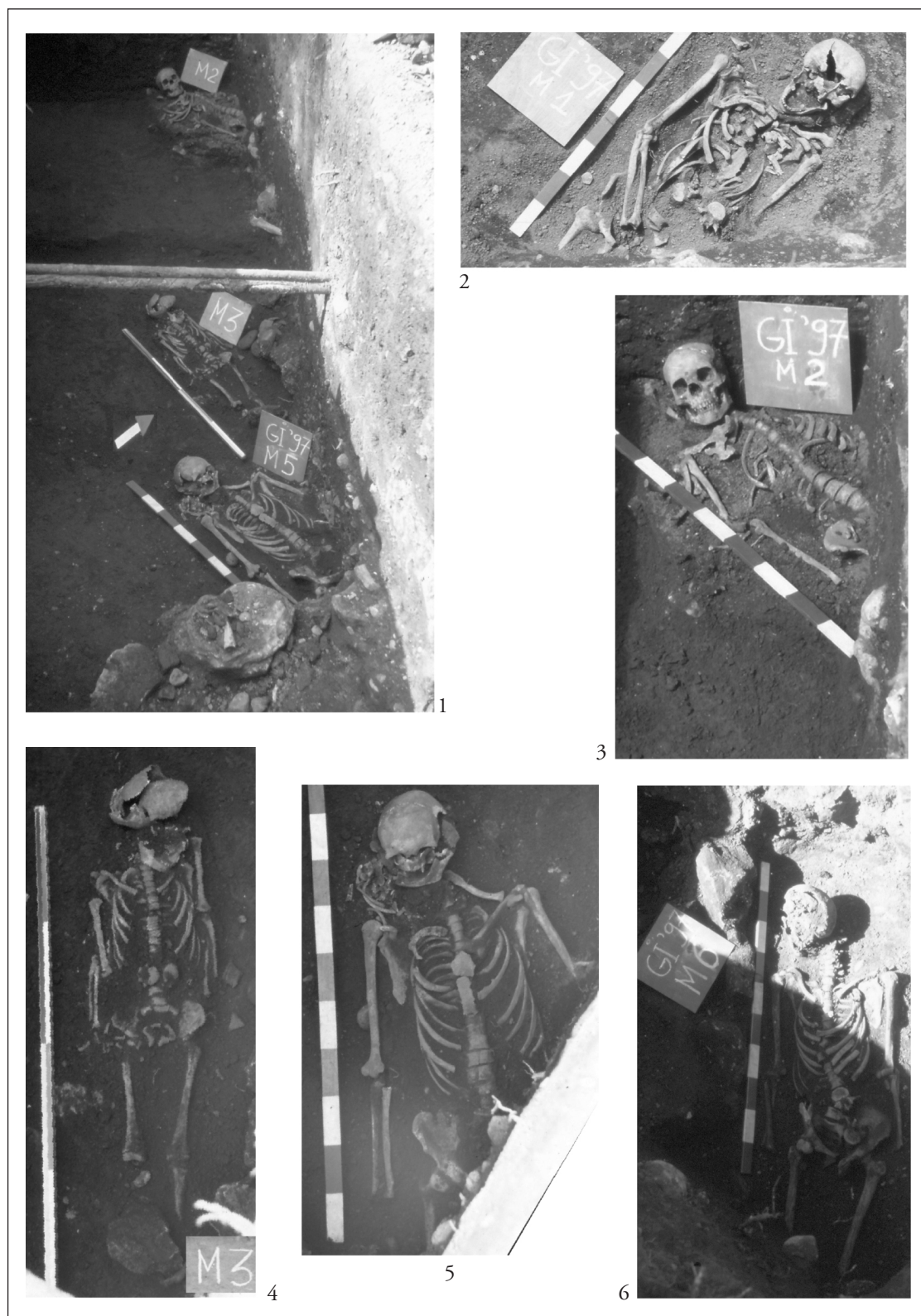
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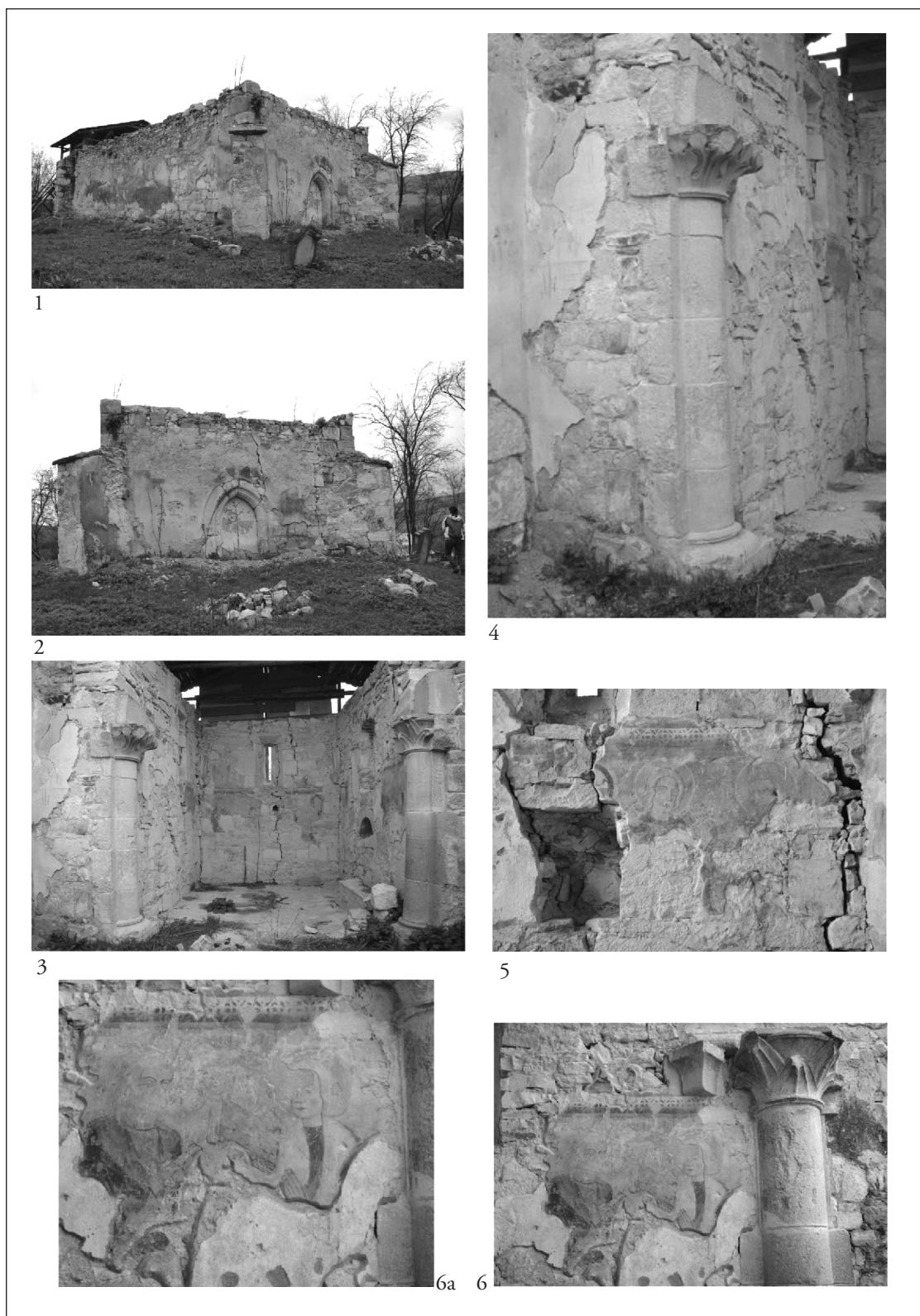
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Pl. 1. Cemetery from Gilău (Cluj county). 1 – Graves 2, 3 and 5. 2 – Grave 1. 3 – Grave 2. 4 – Grave 3. 5 – Grave 5. 6 – Grave 6.



Pl. 2. The church of Nima (14th century).

